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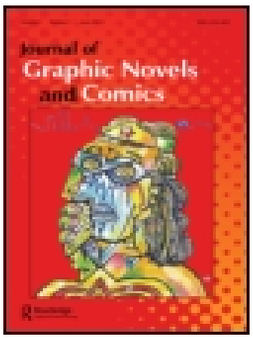

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Pig Gourd: the meaning of Tezuka's playing around with form

An Essay by Natsume Fusanosuke

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ABSTRACT

Taking an arguably minor character from Tezuka Osamu's oeuvre, Natsume Fusanosuke argues how the Pig Gourd's cameos even in the artist's most serious works demonstrate a bifurcated sense of play and high-brow artistry in his manga. Natsume employs an early version of his 'manga-expression theory' (*manga hyōgen-ron)* manga-analysis approach, which he began to develop in this, his first manga-studies monograph and seminal study of the 'god of manga' Tezuka Osamu. This translation of a chapter essay from *Where Is Tezuka Osamu?* (1992) demonstrates Natsume's versatility in isolating thematic patterns or formal experimentations in an artist's style, including character design and page layouts. Natsume's 'manga-expression theory' approach, which focuses on three basic elements of manga (words, pictures, and frames), can be seen in this essay on Tezuka's trademark Pig Gourd character, who will pop up or even decimate panel borders to show not only Tezuka's embarrassment at being unable to resist a sight gag but also his bold desire to play with panel possibilities. The larger picture that Natsume describes here is how this ubiquitous cameo character became a litmus test of readers' tastes as the manga master's target demographic became older and wise to his stylistic idiosyncrasies.

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A translation of Natsume Fusanosuke's 'Hyôtantsugi: hōhōteki na asobi' from *Tezuka Osamu wa doko ni iru* (1992)

Even in his early period, Tezuka Osamu[1] was far ahead of others in thinking that panels could be used to enhance one's manga technique. To understand his genius, let's look at an example from a relatively easy angle. If I line up a few examples that show Tezuka playing with panel borders (*keisen*), one immediately understands that he intentionally dissected the functions that panels have in manga.

At one time, you might see in his early stuff characters that can go through panel borders, and then even when Mustachio (Higeoyaji) has to grab hold of it, it does not break (Figure 1); another fun instance is when a character smashes right into the panel border, it stretches out of shape, and then it rebounds and repels that person (Figure 2a).

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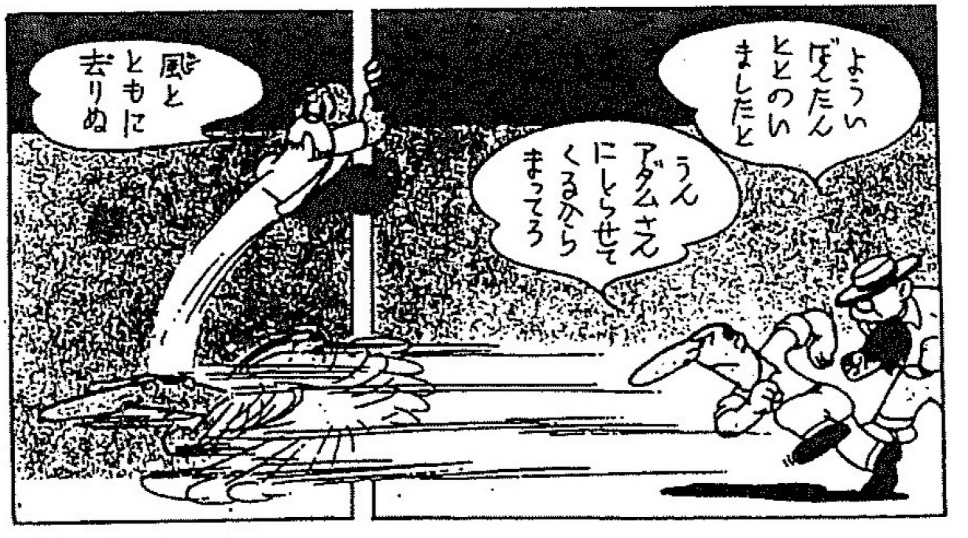


図版18 『ジャングル大帝』(「漫画少年」版)

Figure 1. *Janguru Taitei* (*Kimba, the White Lion*) [*Manga shōnen* edition]. © Tezuka Osamu.

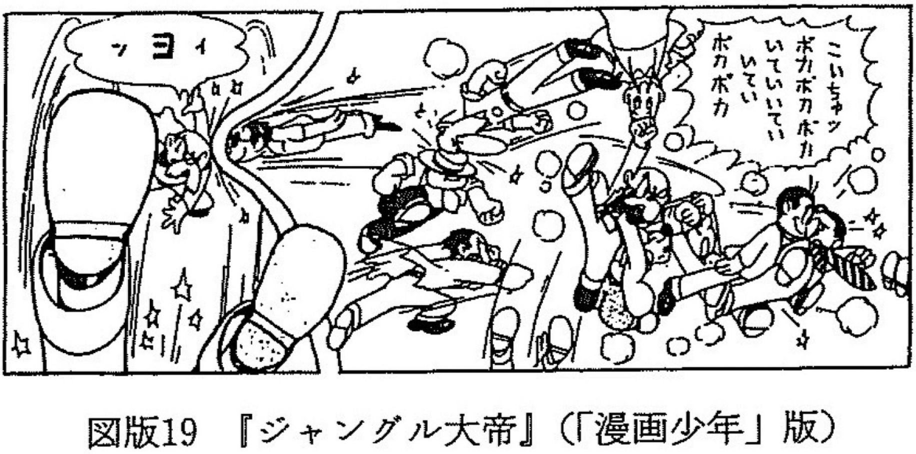
In another manga, Tezuka has the panel do things like rip apart, crumble, and crack wide open (Figure 2b).

All of these examples are taken from the 1950s, basically when Tezuka did this kind of stuff a lot during that golden age of the monthly manga magazines. This is Tezuka 'playing around' (*asobi*) and making fun of manga's own idioms. This kind of play that Tezuka loved to do has two meanings. First, Tezuka was very conscious of the fact that the area between two panels was nothing more than open space, that it was an in-between space. Substantively, it was an area that was enclosed by two border lines from the adjacent panels. In other words, that space was nothing more than a rendering created by two lines. So, as long as you can naturally see it as one column of space, then you could also see it as an in-between space or an interval (*aida*). In fact, you can see it as anything you want.

For Tezuka to notice it like that, well, at first glance it seems that he had a very child-like sensibility. Quite the contrary, he was very mature for seeing things that way. The reason why is that Tezuka could see panels as being nothing but as a type of information that would work as a tool. If you do not prefer describing it that way, then why don't we call it 'a child's sensibility' which Tezuka re-discovered through his intelligence.

I am not saying that Tezuka had a kind of meek, obedient demeanour that made him see things that way. Again, it is quite the opposite. It is exactly because he could establish a design for his panels so they would become an integral part of his 'storytelling' (*monogatari*) process, and, in doing so, he could then clearly see more than anyone else the pure abstract quality of panel borders. What gets packed in the space between panels are layer upon layer of very dense 'time.' Tezuka understood this more than anyone.

(a)



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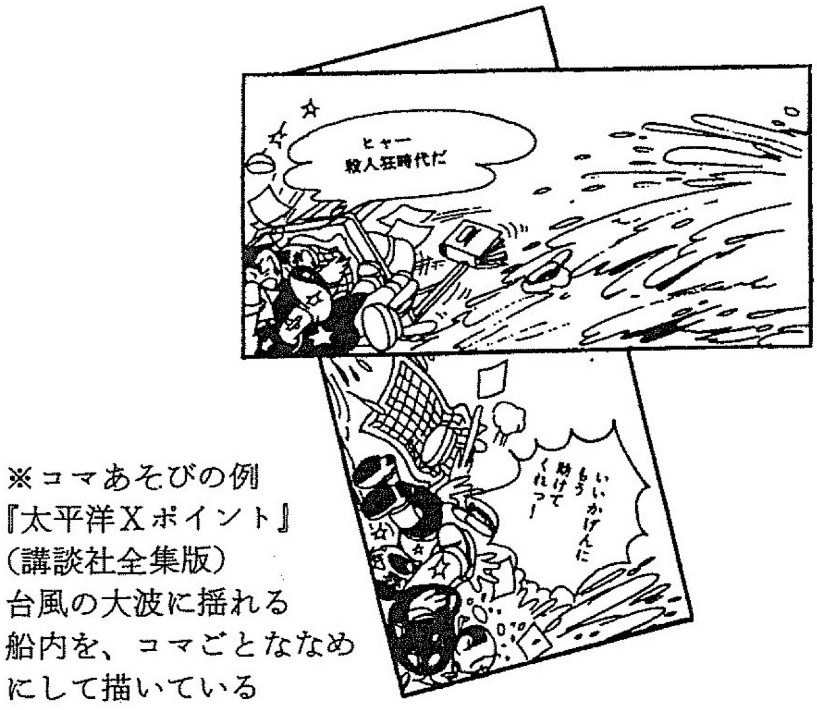


Figure 2. a) *Janguru Taitei* (*Kimba, the White Lion*) [*Manga shōnen* edition]. © Tezuka Osamu. b) An example of Tezuka having fun with panels. (*Taiheiyō X pointo* [X Point, Pacific Ocean], *Kōdansha zenshū* edition). Tezuka draws the impact of the typhoon's wind on the waves and the boat with the panels also tilting diagonally. © Tezuka Osamu.

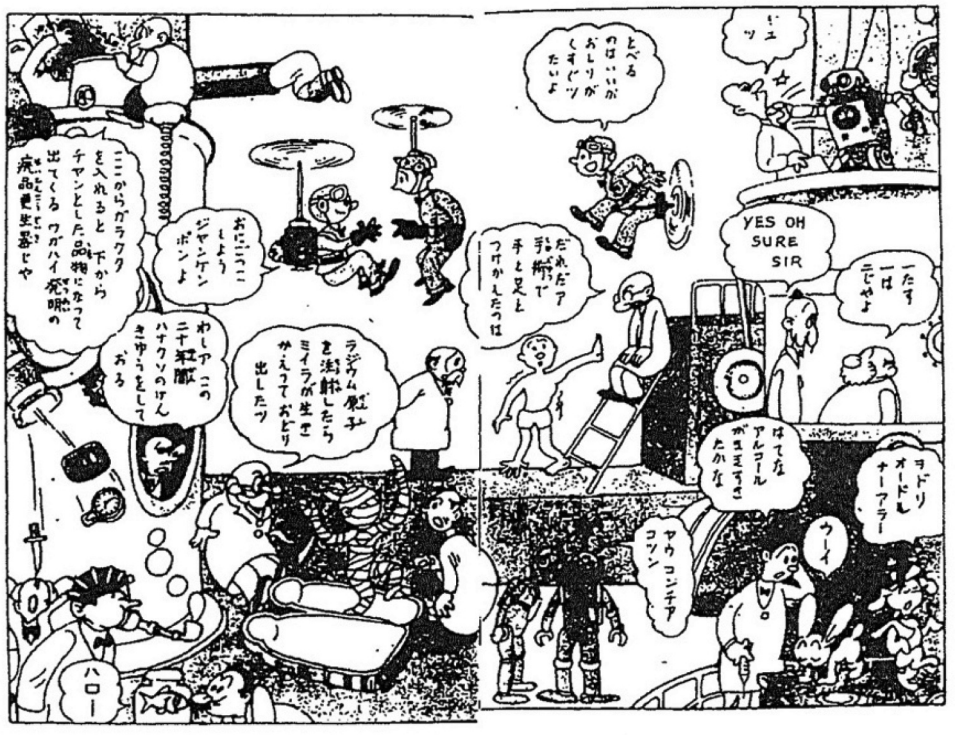
When an artist plays around with panel borders and messes with that 'sense of story time' (*monogatari no jikan*), this kind of humour is best thought of as panel gags. And boy, did Tezuka love to do these playful gags. When you compare him to other manga artists from the same time in the 1950s on this point, you see the difference in Tezuka's

work. This kind of playfulness is the proof that Tezuka was miles ahead of his contemporaries and could add narrativity (*monogatari sei*) even within the gutters of his panels. When it comes to Tezuka's panel border play, at the same time his borders merely indicate lines that substantively bracket off the panels, he also makes that space reveal a kind of step that is packed with 'story' time already loaded into the space between those two borders.

In his early days, Tezuka had a kind of schtick for serious scenes where he would often on purpose insert an utterly disruptive gag or play around by putting a mob scene or something totally chaotic that would have nothing to do with the main plot. These mob scenes would often squeeze in a number of nonsense exchanges. He also liked to have characters from his other manga make an appearance, something sticking out from the panel borders. Tezuka would insert scenes where he makes fun of himself. He had a smorgasbord of gags he liked to use and re-use. For example, there is a scene from *Astro Boy* ('The Third Magician,' [2015, 405]) in which he depicts a tense moment in the story where the character is arguing for an emergency situation, and, all of the sudden, Tezuka puts in a weird character (he goes by the

図版20 『鉄腕アトム・三人の魔術師の巻』
('61～'62年)

Figure 3. *Tetsuwan Atomu* ("Daisan no majutsushi" ["The Third Magician"], 1961–1962). [*Astro Boy Omnibus*, Volume 1, 2015, 405]. © Tezuka Osamu.



図版21 『魔法屋敷』（桃源社版）

Figure 4. *Mahō yashiki* (*Magic Mansion*), Tōgen shuppan. © Tezuka Osamu.

name of Spyder in Tezuka's comics) who greets the reader ('Here ta meet ya!' ['*Omukae de gonsu*']) and even takes Dr. Ochanomizu along with him (Figure 3).

I feel that this kind of playfulness on Tezuka's part was something more or less loved by his readers up until the [late] 1950s. I certainly loved that kind of playing around he did. Discovering even the littlest places where he did it was so much fun for me. [The manga artist] Minamoto Tarō, in his *Famous Lines from Manga* (*Manga no mei-serifu*), mentions a quote from the mob scene of Tezuka's 1948 *Magic Mansion* (*Mahō yashiki* [Tōgen Shuppan]): 'You see, I've been researching snot for the last twenty years!' Minamoto (1997, 53–54) then explains the greater context of this image (Figure 4).

> You see, this is just one thing said in the opening of *Magic Mansion* in its rambling scene (*mankei*: a large playful panel that occupies a full two-page spread [*mihiraki*] where random characters pop out and often speak whatever is on their minds). Searching carefully through each utterance like that one was so much fun and I read his manga very intently. There was no such thing as TV back then, but there was a warmth in the era (Minamoto, *Manga no mei-serifu*, 1997).

I can clearly remember myself too as an elementary school student reading those Tezuka pictures so carefully from corner to corner. Moreover, it was when we only had monthly magazines, so you would read any comic you had over and over until the next issue was published. And perhaps this experience was something shared by those of us who later

would become manga artists and dedicated fans of manga, but I think that all children's manga was read like this by my generation, more or less.

Manga from this time pretty much had to provide 'time' (*jikan*) to sustain repeated readings by its audience like this. This situation changes I think around when television makes its appearance and after the newer weekly manga magazines started becoming popularly consumed. What really gave children's manga its distinctive feel were things like playful picture lines and all the things crammed into the picture done by these artists, like Tezuka; in addition, you would see all the finely rendered line drawings the artist did to sustain the persistent gazing of his children readers. However, at some point, these things become annoying for manga audiences.

In my case, as I became a middle-school student (from about 1963), what really bothered me was that sensibility of children's manga (which corresponded to my elementary-school days) appearing in Tezuka's contemporary works. So, I became attracted to *gekiga* [dramatic pictures] with its look that was sharper and more mechanical than manga. As a middle schooler, I felt a sense of unease about ankle-less legs and those roundly shaped hands. Of course, this was also a time when Tezuka himself was changing his own style. Even so, a part of Tezuka's manga style entered somewhere into my subconscious and that is probably why I still felt an anxiety for his manga that bordered on self-loathing, which was something that I needed as I was maturing into a young man. Today, I think those who feel there is nothing annoying about Tezuka's kind of playing around in his manga are probably limited to the generation that came to love Tezuka's comics while they grew up in the mid-1950s and up through the middle of the 1960s.

This kind of playing around in manga that Tezuka did is something that also destabilised most of his narratives. That is why when people say it is hard to read his stuff, it's true: Tezuka can be hard to read. It is only natural that a later generation, whose first encounter with Tezuka was through his television anime after the 1960s, look at this stuff in his manga and think it just gets in the way of the story.

However, because he has a high level of 'story' (*monogatari*) in his manga, all of his dismembering of his story is still tied up in the little places. On one hand, Tezuka would often feel quite shy, as an adult, for generating the "serious 'epic'" quality in his manga, so that is why you have him otherwise liberating himself with childish jokes that appear in his horsing around with the visuals. We can interpret Tezuka's mentality as an adult-versus-child dilemma. At the same time, we also can see how that Tezuka's dual state corresponds to the kind of readers that existed before manga was differentiated into comics for boys' (*shōnen*) *manga* and for youth (*seinen*) *manga*.

In his work, this play [*asobi*], comes into being at the very point in which Tezuka's 'adult' mode and his 'children' mode swap places; this play will happen at times when both take the same stage, when they appear in the same scene. I think Tezuka felt a little awkward as an adult creator of manga when you see him create a scene where the dramatic tension can get very high, but he then resolves it with his technique of 'childish' play (Figure 5). Such co-habitations of the child element [or mode] with the adult element [or mode] often happen in Tezuka's story constructions (where a child becomes equal to an adult and vice-versa), and although there can be a kind of cross-tension developed between the two poles, because the adult and the child elements can replace each other so easily, I think it all is generated from some unconscious complex on

Figure 5. *Remon Kiddo* (*Lemon Kid*), 1953. © Tezuka Osamu.

Tezuka's part. I think this might be the very thing that links Tezuka's psychology with that of his readers, and that is why Tezuka manga can be relatable to so many people.

The one Tezuka character that best embodies this kind of play is Hyōtan-tsugi (Pig Gourd). According to early instances of the character, as found in *Rock's Adventure Story* (*Rokku bōkenki*, 1952), Pig Gourd is spawned in patches out of the border panels. It consists of something like mushrooms, so Pig Gourd is neither plant nor animal. And, it often appears on Tezuka's pages when the author is being shy about something, and so it inevitably interrupts the dramatic intensity of the story's scene (Figure 6).

The border lines of the panels are things that enclose the space of the 'story' (*monogatari*), so one would not expect the story characters to stick out or jump out of those panel lines, but Tezuka often employed this kind of trick. (In later years, in *shōjo* (girls') manga, it became quite common to have exegetic elements appear purely for decorative use on the page, but in

図版23 （上）『ロック冒険記』（コダマプレス版）
（下）『白骨船長』

Figure 6. Top: *Rock's Adventure* (*Rokku bōkenki*, Kodama Press). Bottom: *Captain Bleachbone* (*Shirobone senchō*). © Tezuka Osamu.

the 1950s such uses were not generally seen.) Moreover, Tezuka would animate Pig Gourd and locate him on the borderlines, dividing the inside and the outside of the 'story.'

These things help us understand Pig Gourd better: if he represents 'an awkwardness from the outside of the storyline' then that must equal an 'authorial self-consciousness' on Tezuka's part. The use of such a character in manga must start with Tezuka. Moreover, since Tezuka, no one else has dared employ a character like him to such a frequency.

And yet, I sense that the existence of such weird characters in manga now shows that their artists are following in Tezuka's footsteps. Starting with Ishinomori Shōtarō: his

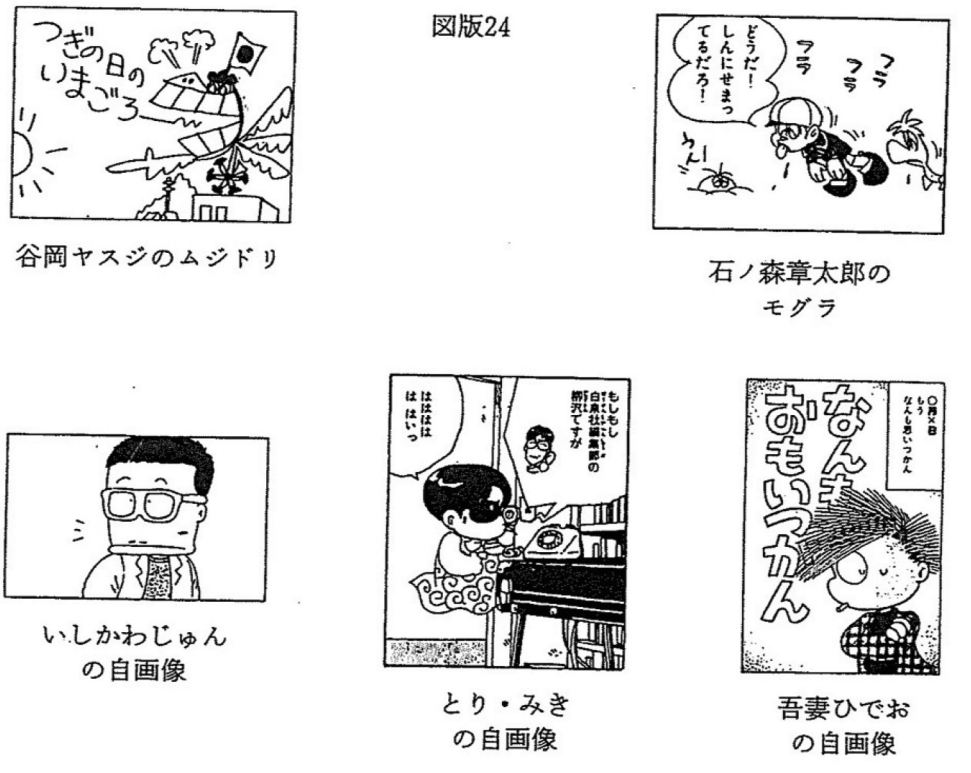


Figure 7. (From Top right to bottom left) Ishinomori Shōtarō's Mogura Mole; Tanioka Yasuji's Mujidori; Azuma Hideo's manga self; Tori Miki's manga self; Ishikawa Jun's manga self. © All images copyright of their respective holders listed herein.

mole is a direct descendant of Pig Gourd. Next, on to Tanioka Yasuji's Mujidori.[2] Then, you have other characters carrying that torch in parodies of themselves as seen in the works of Azuma Hideo, Ishikawa Jun, and Tori Miki (Figure 7).

Let's say that they all are part of the traditional practice in manga of how an artist shows him- or herself being self-conscious. In *I Am A Manga Artist* (*Boku wa mangaka*, 1979), Tezuka Osamu himself wrote about his Pig Gourd character in this way:

> Manga begins from the spirit of doodling, but these days, it is so rare to find any children's manga that has any scrawling. As for myself, I draw serious and deep stories, but when I catch myself overdoing it, I will whip out Pig Gourd with the belief that I can recapture the child inside me.
>
> Recently I have been getting from a lot of kids who tell me, 'That stuff just gets in the way, so please stop doing it.' Somehow their comments bother me and make me kind of sad (Tezuka, *Boku wa mangaka*, 1979).

Tezuka's remarks here were first published in 1969. This was exactly the time when manga became bifurcated into two branches: the 'real' (*riaru*) style of *gekiga* and the fun-and-gags (*gyagu no asobi*) style seen in the work of Akatsuka Fujio. These two styles utterly split people on the way they did manga: you either changed the inner reality

(*riarityi*) or the 'something-like reality' of the manga story, as in gekiga; or, you dismantle the manga from the outside of the story, like with the gag-humour artists. When you think about it like this, Tezuka's manga became utterly split into two.

For Tezuka, there were two inseparable aspects to his manga: his self-consciousness and his strong sense of 'story' (*monogatari*). And Pig Gourd is the one thing that proves from the story exterior that these two things existed for Tezuka. As manga advances into the latter part of the 1960s, Pig Gourd then becomes an impediment to Tezuka's newly reformed manga 'stories,' so it becomes necessary for Pig Gourd to retreat to the greener pastures of Tezuka's gag manga.

The question of how Tezuka Osamu made it through this period in manga is a question we need to take up at another time. However, this is a moment in our story where Pig Gourd becomes a point of contention for readers. (And I too felt something was weird about the way it made its appearances in Tezuka's stories once we got to the mid-Sixties, although I was a reader who really loved that piggy character.) We reached a point where readers could not help but feel a rupture between Tezuka's manga and manga itself at this time in the 1960s, which was finally undergoing its own awakening of consciousness.

It was during this time where Tezuka took his image of manga, which he had grasped as something universal up to then, and he began to break manga apart into various new expressions and experimental efforts, until he had fully dismantled those earlier qualities of 'unity' and 'universality' of his. And all the while he was developing those stories, manga itself kept expanding, growing larger and more diverse than ever.

Translators' commentary

Readers of this essay might immediately ask next, 'If this Pig Gourd character was so big, why don't I see its manga on store bookshelves alongside *Astro Boy, Attack on Titan* and *Demon Slayer*?' Even having read Natsume's take on Pig Gourd, the character may remain a bit of mystery to the uninitiated. But, as Natsume explained, for fans of Tezuka Osamu (1928–1989), Pig Gourd has long been a beloved character, even if he never headlined a Tezuka comic. Even so, a Pig Gourd cameo is always welcome to fans in a Tezuka story.

Within English-language Tezuka and manga studies, Hyōtan-tsugi is commonly known as 'Pig Gourd,' because a literal translation of its Japanese name as 'Gourd Patches,' with the 'patch' (*tsugi* in *tsugihagi*) suggesting a patchwork repair of clothes, might be too cryptic for the casual reader. It is true though that Pig Gourd is a shabby-looking clown character with a beat-up frame and 'patch' bandages that often cover its pathetic body. Because it is such a minor character, it seems hard to fathom why would a Tezuka specialist like Natsume Fusanosuke (1950-) dedicate a whole chapter of his study on the author and his works to Pig Gourd. Flaubert, we are told, once said of his greatest creation: 'Madame Bovary, c'est moi.' The same could be said of Pig Gourd for Tezuka. It might be an over-exaggeration to apply a similar logic to the stumpy Pig Gourd and its magnificent creator Tezuka, but it is a good analogy: Pig Gourd, psychology, and over-exaggeration are keys to understanding Tezuka's genius as a manga creator.

The American authority on Tezuka Osamu, Frederik Schodt (2007, 53), defines Pig Gourd as 'a silly patched-up mushroom-gourd, [who] often flies out of nowhere at the

most inappropriate moments,' adding that the character was 'invented by Tezuka as a small boy, [and is] used solely for comic relief.' As Natsume demonstrated in this essay, the fifth chapter from his seminal book *Where Is Tezuka Osamu?* (*Tezuka Osamu wa doko ni iru*, 1992), Pig Gourd is far from being mere comic relief. If anything, this small and seemingly dispensable cameo character is indicative of the pure freedom Tezuka felt from working in manga. To understand Pig Gourd is to understand how, for Tezuka, manga was an art form where anything was possible.

The parent book for this chapter essay was Natsume's first full foray into manga scholarship. Prior to the 1992 release of *Where Is Tezuka Osamu?*, Natsume had been highly active both as a cartoonist and an author of witty books on contemporary culture. Because he often brings his comic-drawing skills to his writing and scholarship, he is exceptionally well equipped to analyse the form he discusses. In this sense, an easy comparator to Natsume is Scott McCloud. Natsume, too, was the author-artist of a number of manga series which ran in manga magazines from the 1980s and 1990s. Examples of his manga, such as *Oh Wise Miso* (*Kenmei naru miso*), can be found in his discussions of panel construction now translated into English (Natsume 2021). An earlier effort to translate a Natsume comic into English – and a good example of his 'manga criticism through manga'—can be found in the pages of *Mechademia* (2008), which featured the full six pages of his 'Komatopia,' which he published in his proto-criticism volume *Mangagaku* (*Natsume Fusanosuke no mangagaku: Manga de yomu manga*, [*The Study of Manga*], 1985). Over time though, Natsume became even more prolific as a 'manga columnist' (his self-styled moniker) and even a host on Japanese public television's panel shows about manga (*Manga yawa* [Manga Night Talks]) and Natsume's own twelve-episode educational series on NHK, entitled *Why Is Manga So Interesting?* (*Manga wa naze omoshiroi no ka*, 1997).

When Tezuka Osamu, the 'god of manga' (*manga no kamisama*), died in 1989, the shock of the event affected all of Japan: the general public, manga lovers young and old, and especially artists and critics in the field were all saddened. It was the end of an era. In Japan, Schodt writes (1996, 233), 'he was mourned like a fallen monarch. Tezuka had lived sixty years, almost exactly the length of the Shōwa Emperor's reign, but many people seemed far more shocked by [Tezuka's] death than that of the emperor, which occurred only a few weeks earlier.' Natsume was particularly moved by the master's passing. Immediately after that, he began to construct fifteen essays that traced the rise and fall (and rise) of Tezuka's oeuvre. This author-centric study became a central text in the still nascent field of manga studies. Although other portions of *Where Is Tezuka Osamu?* have been translated and published elsewhere (Natsume 2013), we presented in English this essay with its seemingly idiosyncratic focus but actually one quite original and insightful. Other recent translations of Natsume's work in English have been forthcoming in recent years (for a concise self-written summary by Natsume of his 'manga-expression theory' (*manga hyōgen-ron*), see Natsume [2020c]). With the goal of helping scholars in the West to begin to assess the trajectory of Natsume's important role in Manga Studies, we wanted this chapter to be made available in English so it will be possible to further situate the origins of Natsume's 'manga-expression theory,' even if this essay does hinge on a two-bit character in Tezuka's oeuvre.

Despite his rather oblique use, Pig Gourd was nonetheless an important and notable 'actor' in Tezuka's 'star system' (*sutā shisutemu*). Susanne Phillipps (2008, 76–77) writes

that 'all of [Tezuka's] stories from 1947 to 1955 have the same characters in them,' and Tezuka thought of his 'star system' characters, who, 'just like real actors [] are typecast to fit particular roles, [Tezuka's] characters appear in different manga playing their assigned bits.' Phillipps (78–79) describes Pig Gourd's role as one of Tezuka's star-system characters who have

> nothing to do with the plot per se, but appear in cameo roles for comedic effect. The most famous of these is a strange being called 'Hyōtan-tsugi.' It is shaped like a gourd bottle and covered with patches. Ordinary characters can suddenly mutate into Hyōtan-tsugi when they get angry, excited, or are ashamed, only to be restored to their original form in the next panel. When Tezuka wants to stress strong emotions, the Hyōtan-tsugi bursts straight out of the panel. When something stupid happens in the story, it rains Hyōtan-tsugi.

Philipps then provides an important corollary to Schodt's definition: Pig Gourd can be used for gags but also Tezuka will use it to indirectly show a character's psychological struggle albeit in coded form. Her point overlaps precisely with the argument Natsume made earlier in this essay that – as odd as it might seem – through such extremely iconic or cartoony characters, one can see Tezuka's bifurcated and sophisticated approach to manga storytelling. Natsume reminds us that Tezuka did want to have it both ways: he liked to 'horse around' but he also liked to wear the beret of the aesthete and experiment with 'temporality' in his art form.

Pig Gourd might be a mere joke character that Tezuka capriciously dropped into the action, but, as Natsume pointed out, it is a greater indicator of the genius of Tezuka, who precociously understood a range of creative possibilities for the manga page. In the hands of Tezuka, Pig Gourd was a tool to carry out experiments on page layouts. If anything, the presence of Pig Gourd usually will signal that the author is playing with the notions of 'open space' ('intervals,' *ma* or *aida* in Japanese) or the supposed rigidity of 'panel borders' (*keisen*). To further extend what this means, Natsume asserts here that the play with the space on the manga page changes the reader's conception of diegetic and exegetic 'time.' (Natsume further develops these ideas in his later *Why Is Manga So Interesting?: Its Expression and Grammar* [1997], particularly Chapters Ten and Twelve [see translations thereof in Natsume 2020a, 2020b]; see also Lukas Wilde's interpretation of Natsume's concepts in his well-written 2020 *Mechademia* article). In other words, with these early experiments using his gag character Pig Gourd, Tezuka was regularly dropping atomic bombs and exploding the notion of manga's possibilities for his fans in the 1950s and 1960s through the cameos by this shabby mushroom character. Pig Gourd is that big.

And yet, it is still just a blobby character who might only appear once every 100 pages in a Tezuka graphic novel. One might be hard pressed to extrapolate much meaning from its eruptions onto the page, but the scenes in which it appears are often quite pivotal in Tezuka's stories. For example, in Tezuka's acclaimed biography *Buddha* (published in English in the eight-volume series by Vertical), one only sees the character at odd but oddly compelling moments. In Volume 1 of the Vertical series (Tezuka [2003] 2006, 122), the slave Chapra, who tries to pull off a spectacular social ascension into the elite Kshatriya warrior ranks, is haunted by his lower caste. As a slave, he is branded so. He shows a comrade this burn scar on the bottom of his foot. Incredibly, it is the shape of Pig Gourd. It would be incredible as a brand in pre-modern India, but all too believable in a

Tezuka comic. It is fundamentally a marker of Chapra's humanity. Chapra's awareness and obsession with his slave heritage – focalised through Pig Gourd's cameo – is a pivotal scene on which Chapra's drama in this prequel volume will turn. Another equally fascinating (even if it seems trivial) Pig Gourd appearance is in a 28-panel page within Vertical's third volume of the series (Tezuka [2003] 2006, 251): in a bravura performance, Tezuka draws twenty-eight permutations of the Buddha's face as he reflects on his mortality, each with their own separate panels on one page. Pig Gourd pops in one of them, again reminding the viewer of the Buddha's humanity all the while its appearance also gives the sequence a sense of distorted time. From these examples alone, it is clear that Pig Gourd, as Natsume eloquently argued, was far more than an in-joke for *Buddha*'s readers, because Tezuka often used the character to transcend manga's conventions and take his manga to some otherworldly, meta-level where one is reminded of the constructed nature of the story before one's eyes. The reader of this manga biography might assume that, after all, there is a place in Buddha's world (and Buddhism), even for a cheap-looking piggy reject. The worry of death makes us all equally human.

Finally, in this article, Natsume traced a kind of lineage of pop-up or cameo characters that later manga artists, such as Azuma Hideo, felt empowered to regularly drop in their stories, thus giving manga a dual sense of freedom and self-reflexivity. Certainly, these insertions of self-parodies or gag characters are indulgences on the part of the artists. But then, manga has always been indulgent 'play' (*asobi*) for its creators. At least in Japanese manga and definitely in Tezuka's works, they are intimately connected. Thus, in manga, gags have fuelled technical and creative innovation. Although Natsume did not make the full connection between American comic strip and manga's technical innovation as others have done recently (Exner 2022), what he has done over the course of his writing since the 1990s is to argue that there is a continuity, a heritage in twentieth-century manga of doing humorous 'doodles' that are 'self-parodies.' And, Tezuka's Pig Gourd is modern manga's precursor self-reflexive icon, one that those after him have followed, emulated, and modified to match their own personae.

In fact, we find that one of the weaknesses of Manga Studies has been the focus on 'story' or novelistic manga where manga's origins as a venue for humorous and comedy has been forgotten. Certainly, an important development in the evolution of manga has been the *gekiga* ('dramatic pictures') style, begun by artists, such as Tatsumi Yoshihiro and Shirato Sanpei. Their two exemplary roles in the development of 'mature' manga and serious *gekiga* has been well documented in English-language studies (Shamoon 2011; Rosenbaum 2012; Suzuki 2018; Holmberg 2011, 2013, 2015, 2021). However, Yonezawa Yoshihiro, the great manga genre historian, reminds us (2009, 194) of the important role humour manga still had during the formative years of 1960 and 1970—the same time that Tezuka kept peddling his Pig Gourd character even in his most serious *gekiga*-like manga, such as *Buddha*. 'The popularity of *Star of the Giants* (*Kyōjin no hoshi*) and *Tomorrow's Joe* (*Ashita no Jō*) only advanced the path of gekiga. However, there was another important pillar of manga that greatly extended its influence during this period, and that was the style of gag manga best represented by Akatsuka Fujio,' creator of *Tensai Bakabon* (*Genius-Idiot Bakabon*), *Akamatsu-kun* (*The Sextuplets*), and more." Yonezawa's argument in his *Gag Manga History* is that humour was not actually alien to the most commercially successful and artistically innovative manga – the two often went hand in hand. Another creator that Yonezawa sees as shrewdly capitalising on both

humour manga and more serious story-manga strains was Nagai Gō (creator of *Devilman*, *Mazinger Z*, and *Harenchi Gakuen* [Shameless School]). And of his *Abashiri Family* (*Abashiri ikka*, 1969–1973), Yonezawa writes (2009, 192), 'Make no mistake, what we see is Nagai pushing manga even further into an act of play (*asobu*) that was only possible and came into being over twenty-years prior in the history of manga that began with Tezuka Osamu.' As evident in Yonezawa's statement, there is another aspect of manga history that hinges on the creativity of gag manga artists for which we must recognise and reappraise. And Tezuka Osamu is often the starting point for his work establishing this 'pillar' (*hashira*)—to borrow Yonezawa's word – of the gag manga genre.

After all, even though in Comics Studies and Manga Studies, much scholarship often focuses on serious stories and mature developments in the comics genres of the world, manga very much grew out of funny comics and the desire to amuse. Lest we forget that manga (and comics) have their roots in humour, we should pay close attention to Natsume's analysis of this shabby gag character and why, no matter how hard it is to believe, Pig Gourd can simultaneously generate laughs but also shed light on Tezuka's bold innovations in manga forms. In his description of Pig Gourd, Natsume revealed how this pathetic cameo character was used in Tezuka's skilful hands to function all at once for a sight gag, for self-parody and for authorial self-consciousness. For Natsume, Pig Gourd then is a sign of manga's past and its future. Was Natsume really suggesting that this minor, sketchy character is nothing to laugh at? Yes, he was. Pig Gourd is nothing to laugh at.

—End of Translators' Commentary

Notes

1. [Translators' Note] Japanese names are presented in the Japanese order with the surname preceding given name without separation by comma.
2. [Translators' Note] Tanioka's 'Muji-dori' is an instantly recognisable creation by the gag-manga artist. His obnoxious time-telling bird is a beloved fixture in his comics, but the name 'Muji-dori' is nearly untranslatable just by looking at it. The prefix for this bird (*muji*) could be interpreted a number of ways, so one can truly know the right meaning when translating this word. In a personal email with Natsume, he kindly explained to us the meaning: 'Muji' means 'no pattern' or 'blank.' Apparently, Tanioka was 'too lazy' to work out the details for his bird character, so he made it into 'No-Pattern Bird' (Natsume, Personal email with translators, November 12, 2022).

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